Read this important information before taking:

ISMP INSTITUTE FOR SAFE MEDICATION PRACTICES

Oral Methotrexate (to treat conditions other than cancer)

Take extra care! Oral methotrexate is a high-alert medicine.

This means that oral methotrexate has been proven to be safe and effective, but it can cause serious harm, including death, if not taken exactly as directed—just Once A Week.

Top 10 List of Safety Tips for **Oral Methotrexate**

When Your Doctor Prescribes Oral Methotrexate

Tell

☐ ❶ **Tell your doctor about all your diseases and conditions.** Methotrexate may not be right for you if you have any of the following: a blood or bone marrow disorder (e.g., low white blood cell or platelet count, anemia); kidney or liver disease; stomach ulcer; ulcerative colitis; AIDS; a drinking problem; a weak immune system; or if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant.

☐ ❷ **Tell the doctor what else you take.** Certain medicines increase the risk of bad side effects when taken with methotrexate. Provide the doctor with a list of all the prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal medicines, vitamins, and other dietary supplements you take. While taking methotrexate, tell your doctor if you start or stop any medicines, herbals, or dietary supplements. Common over-the-counter medicines, herbal medicines, and vitamins to avoid can be found on the other side of this page in the **Fast Facts** table.

Show & Tell

☐ ❸ **Know why you take oral methotrexate and how to take it.** To treat conditions like psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis, methotrexate is taken in a single dose **ONCE A WEEK.** Or, the weekly dose may be divided into three smaller doses that are taken 12 hours apart. The medicine is **NEVER** taken daily to treat conditions other than cancer. Check that you understand by telling the doctor why you are taking methotrexate, how often you will take it, what strength pills you will take, and how many pills you will take each time.

☐ ❹ **Look for the reason.** Ask your doctor to put the reason for your medicine on the prescription. Small doses used to treat conditions like psoriasis and rheumatoid arthritis are taken just once a week or in three smaller doses taken 12 hours apart. Larger doses used to treat cancer may be taken more often. Your pharmacist can make sure your dose and directions for taking the medicine are correct if your condition is on the prescription.

When Filling Your Prescription for Oral Methotrexate

☐ ❺ **Choose a day.** Choose a day of the week that you will take your medicine and ask your pharmacist to include that in the instructions on the label. Avoid "Monday," which has been misread as "Morning." This mistake has led people to take a dose each "Morning" instead of each "Monday."

Ask

☐ ❻ **Ask for education.** Ask your pharmacist to go over the directions for taking the medicine.

When Taking Oral Methotrexate

☐ ❼ **Take exactly as directed.** Do **NOT** take methotrexate every day or take extra doses to relieve your symptoms. Symptom relief begins in 3 to 6 weeks after starting the medicine. Improvement is gradual for the first few months.

☐ ❽ **Tell your healthcare providers.** Tell your doctors, dentists, and pharmacists that you are taking methotrexate.

☐ ❾ **Avoid sunlight.** Methotrexate can cause severe sunburn. If you are in the sun, use a sunscreen on your skin and wear sunglasses and a hat.

When You Should Call Your Doctor

Call

☐ ❿ **Call immediately** if you have severe diarrhea or black stools (poop); sores in your mouth, nose, or throat; a rash or red, peeling, blistered skin; fever or chills; trouble breathing; a racing heartbeat; bleeding; very bad dizziness or weakness; confusion; persistent stomach or back pain; or changes in how often you urinate. If you can't reach your doctor, get medical treatment in an emergency room or urgent care center.

DO NOT TAKE THIS MEDICINE EVERY DAY!

Deadly errors have happened when methotrexate was taken daily instead of just once a week. To treat conditions besides cancer, this medicine should be taken weekly, **NOT** daily. Weekly doses are taken as a single dose or divided into three smaller doses taken 12 hours apart.

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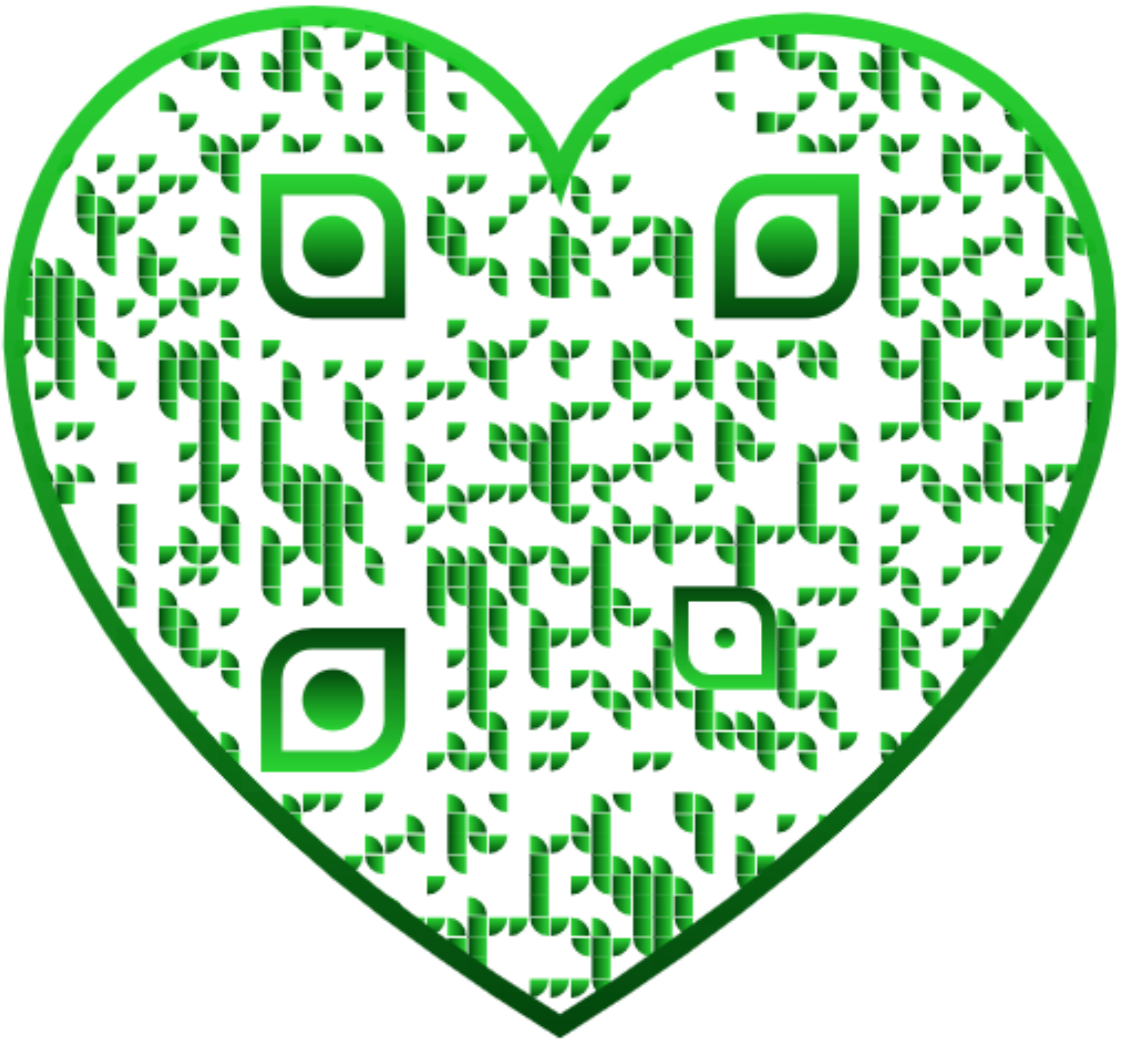

Oral Methotrexate

Brought to you by the
Institute for Safe Medication Practices

Once a WEEK is the Only Way!

Read this important story!

Methotrexate is a cancer medicine. However, it is also used to treat other conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. It works well for these conditions if you take the medicine just once a **WEEK** and in smaller doses.

Most medicines are taken daily, but not methotrexate. If you take methotrexate every day by accident, you could be harmed. Sadly, some people have even died when taking methotrexate daily for conditions other than cancer.

In one case, an older man with arthritis mistakenly took one tablet each morning, but the directions said to take one tablet each Monday. In another case, the prescription label said to take the medicine every 12 hours for just three doses. But a woman took the medicine every 12 hours for 6 days in a row. Another man took many extra doses to help relieve arthritis pain, something that should never be done.

Serious harm, even death, could occur if you take methotrexate daily for conditions other than cancer.

Read the **Top 10 List of Safety Tips** on the other side of this handout to help avoid mistakes.

Topics	Fast Facts
Generic name	■ methotrexate (pronounced meth-o-TREKS-ate)
Common brand names	■ Trexall (tablets), Xatmep (oral liquid) (generic available for tablets)
Common uses (to treat conditions other than cancer)	■ Rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile arthritis, psoriasis, multiple sclerosis, lupus, difficult-to-treat asthma, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease), other inflammatory diseases
Usual dose	■ Most common strength of pills is 2.5 mg ■ Usual dose is 5 mg to 30 mg **weekly** (higher doses are used only if treating cancer) ■ **Weekly** doses are taken as a single dose or divided into three smaller doses taken 12 hours apart (no more than three doses should be taken 12 hours apart each week) ■ If you forget to take a dose, call your doctor for instructions
Special instructions and precautions	■ Your doctor may prescribe folic acid with methotrexate; your doctor may instruct you to skip the folic acid on the day you take methotrexate ■ Avoid drinking alcohol while taking this medicine ■ This medicine may affect fertility in both men and women
Safety during pregnancy/ breastfeeding	■ Methotrexate is known to cause birth defects in the children of both men and women who take it ■ Women should not take methotrexate during pregnancy; to be safe, talk to your doctor about how long to wait after treatment to become pregnant (usually 1 to 3 months) ■ Men should wait at least 3 months after stopping treatment before getting their partner pregnant ■ Do not take methotrexate while breastfeeding, as it can harm your baby
Storage	■ Store at room temperature and protect from light ■ Keep the lid of the medicine tightly closed ■ Keep oral methotrexate and all medicines out of the reach of children
Side effects	■ Minimal side effects (e.g., nausea, vomiting, drowsiness) occur with low doses (30 mg or less each week) ■ A very bad skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome) may happen; get medical help right away if you develop red, peeling, blistered skin; a skin rash; or sores in your mouth, nose, or throat
Over-the-counter medicines, herbals, or vitamins that should NOT be taken with methotrexate UNLESS prescribed by your doctor	■ Vitamins that contain folic acid or echinacea ■ Aspirin and aspirin-containing products; ask your doctor before starting, continuing, or stopping low dose aspirin (81 mg daily) ■ Check with your doctor if you take medicines for acid reflux or heartburn (e.g., Prevacid, Prilosec, Nexium) ■ Check with your doctor if nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and naproxen (Aleve) can be taken safely with methotrexate
Prescription medicines that should NOT be taken with methotrexate	■ Check with your doctor; some medicines that may be a problem include: vaccines, acitretin, cyclosporine, foscarnet, sulfonamides, tacrolimus, pimecrolimus, clozapine ■ Do not take methotrexate with antibiotics that contain trimethoprim and sulfa (e.g., Bactrim, Sulfatrim); your doctor may tell you to skip your dose of methotrexate that week
Special tests your doctor may prescribe	■ If you can get pregnant, a pregnancy test will be done to be sure you are not pregnant before starting methotrexate ■ Your doctor may check your kidney and liver function and make sure your body is making enough blood cells with a blood test every 1 to 3 months

This information does not replace the need to follow your doctor's instructions. Read the drug information leaflet provided with your prescription.